

Downing Thomas: Welcome, everyone. Welcome to this special edition of WorldCanvass. My name is Downing Thomas. I'm associate provost and dean of International Programs here at the University of Iowa. And this is a wonderful occasion to present the International Impact Award, which is an award that goes to someone every year, an alumnus or alumna, or a friend of the University of Iowa who has made an impact, a significant impact, internationally or globally, to improve the lives and livelihoods of people around the world through new discoveries, through spreading joy, as our awardee this year has done over many years.

Downing Thomas: And so it's my pleasure to welcome you tonight. And I have the honor of introducing president Bruce Harreld, the 21st president of the University of Iowa, who will introduce our awardee, our special awardee tonight. It's no secret that's Simon Estes, but, Bruce, I think you'll have the substance of the introduction tonight. Thank you for coming.

Bruce Harreld: Thank you. Thank you, Downing, and thank all of you for turning out here this evening. This is a remarkable opportunity to celebrate a remarkable citizen of our university, our state, our country, and the world. It's my great honor to be part of this, particularly since this is the International Programs International Impact Award, and it's also during International Education Week. So it's a very special moment across our campus.

Bruce Harreld: Tonight we get to celebrate an internationally renowned opera singer, Simon Estes. He's a Centerville, Iowa, native and graduate of this university. His exceptional music talents were immediately recognized when he joined the Old Gold Singers as an undergraduate. After earning a bachelor's degree from our university, his talent led him to a full scholarship at the Juilliard School of Music. Mr. Estes's operatic debut as Ramfis in Aida at the Deutsche Oper Berlin in 1965 launched a truly remarkable international career.

Bruce Harreld: Mr. Estes is part of a group of performers who were instrumental in helping to break down the barriers of racial prejudice in the world of opera. He was the first black man to sing a leading role at the prestigious Bayreuth Festival when he performed the title role in Wagner's The Flying Dutchman. He has performed in 84 of the world's greatest opera houses, has sung for six US presidents as well as Pope John Paul II. He helped open the 1972 Olympics in Munich and sang in South Africa in the 2010 opening of the World Cup, and that is just a small, small touch of what he has done around the world. Truly notable performances.

Bruce Harreld: Aside from his many master classes throughout the country and internationally, Simon Estes has also taught music at Wartburg College, Iowa State University, Des Moines Area Community College, and Boston University, just to name a few. His grandfather was a slave and father a coal miner. As a result, he's always mindful of the life changing role philanthropy has played in his own life and has created numerous educational scholarships and foundations around the world

to benefit children and students, including the Simon Estes Fund here at the University of Iowa.

Bruce Harreld: In 2008, in response to the tragic tornado and flooding here in this area, Mr. Estes performed benefit concerts for the citizens of Parkersburg and Waverly, Iowa. He also raises funds for the United Nations Foundation Nothing But Nets organization to fight malaria. For those efforts, he received the lifetime impact award in 2017 from the United Nations Foundation. Here in Iowa, Simon's received, among many honors and distinctions, the Iowan Award, which is the state's highest honor and the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Achievement Award.

Bruce Harreld: The university presented him with a distinguished alumni award 41 years ago in 1978. We thank Simon for his creative and tireless work on behalf of the world's people and we express our deepest appreciation for his continued, fruitful relationship with the University of Iowa. It's now my great honor to help present this year's International Impact Award to Simon Estes. Now please invite Mr. Estes to the podium to receive the award. [inaudible 00:05:27].

Simon Estes: Thank you. Thank you very much. I'm deeply humbled and honored to receive this wonderful award. The University of Iowa means a lot to me and we'll talk about it later. But this evening, I love the two words that represent this organization. Impact means you have an influence or a force and the word canvass means that it covers the whole world. So I like those two words, but I want to thank the president, the dean, and all of the faculty members here. It's wonderful to be in this auditorium. It wasn't here when I was here back in the mid-1950s but North Hall, I understand, it still there. Is that true?

Crowd: Yes.

Simon Estes: Okay, well thank you again for the award, Mr. President. I want to thank you and your wife. My wife and I thank you both for a beautiful dinner and all of the other wonderful people who were there. So, God bless all of you, and then we'll continue I guess. Thank you.

Downing Thomas: Excuse the swallow, take a photograph. [crosstalk 00:07:17].

Speaker 6: You want to make sure all of your eyes are open. And I'll grab one for immediate sharing.

Downing Thomas: Thanks, Joan, take it away.

Joan Kjaer: Thank you. A big thank you to President Harreld and also to Dean Thomas from International Programs for getting us started tonight. This is a very special WorldCanvass for us. I met Simon Estes first in your recordings, having worked in a public radio station for many years and enjoyed your voice. And then we communicated as we were getting ready for this program. Always gracious, always so helpful and kind and there's nothing more we can say about that,

except, I'll bet about two thirds of the people in this room already know that about you.

Joan Kjaer: So we want to learn a little more about you, your life, and music. Also the very important background you had as you grew up here in Iowa and how that, sort of, forged the person you have become later in your life. Then also some of the philanthropic efforts you've been involved with in these last many years. So, let's start with where you grew up.

Simon Estes: Well, I grew up in a little town called Centerville, Iowa. I'm sure many of you know that. It's a coal mining town and I went to school there. My family was very important in my life. My grandfather, as many of you know, was a slave, sold for \$500 and he couldn't read or write, but he came to Centerville. My father did from his father. My grandfather was born in 1837 in Kentucky, and, as we know, this is the year 2019. It was exactly 400 years ago, this year that black slaves were brought over from Africa.

Simon Estes: And my grandfather was born, as I said, in 1837 in Kentucky. And he and his wife who was also a slave, migrated to Missouri. And from Missouri they came to Iowa, and my mother was born in Centerville, Iowa, in 1910. My father was born in Missouri in 1891. My foundation is built on faith, education and music.

Simon Estes: We were very, very poor economically speaking, but we were very wealthy in our love for God and for fellow men and the importance of education. As I said, my father couldn't read or write. He was taken out of school and he was in the third reader and, back in those days, in the colored schools, they didn't call them grades, they called them readers. But a third reader meant third grade, but, needless to say--we were colored also in those days--the schools were quite inferior to the others.

Simon Estes: So my father literally could not read or write, my mother taught him to read a little bit when they got married, just a few passages from the Bible. But he knew the value of an education and he stressed education for my three older sisters and me--the importance of education. And we also were taught to have faith, to believe in God, and to be loving not only to God but to one another. As I said, we were very poor in our little house. It's still ... it's there, the house in which I was born in 1938. So those of you who are good in math, and I know that the president is very good with math and figures...

Simon Estes: And it was a little house that was 27 feet by 25 feet and a family of six lived there, three older sisters, my mother and my father. And the little house is still there. It's at 910 East Jackson Street in Centerville, it's right on the corner and I was delivered by Dr. Brummet, and Dr. Brummet and my father knew each other in Missouri before both of them came to Centerville. He was a medical doctor and my father came there to work in the coal mines.

Simon Estes: But what is ironic is Dr. Brummet delivered me from my mother in that little house at 910 East Jackson Street. And, what I said before, ironic means that Dr. Brummet breast fed on my grandmother, she was a wet nurse and she delivered me. And of course they were Caucasian. And those of us who are advanced citizens, maybe some of the younger people don't know about this, but they had a lot of wet nurses back in those days. And I knew Dr. Brummet and he lived to be about 100 years of age. My parents stressed, always, to me, education, faith and music.

Simon Estes: And I feel very blessed that I was born economically poor and that I was born with a slightly darker tone of skin because it enabled me to know what life is about and that we are all human beings. So that's kind of the history I'd say of my birth and I graduated, of course, from high school in Centerville in 1956, went one year to junior college as it was called in Centerville. In 1957, I transferred to the University of Iowa.

Simon Estes: We had a little, beat-up, upright piano in our home in Centerville. My mother played the piano. We went to church two times on Sundays back in those days, Sunday morning and Sunday evening. My father knew the value of education, even though he didn't have a formal education. He said, son you must get an education. That is something that nobody can ever take away from you. My mother was the talker in our family and she finished 11th grade and I remember she always said she was so sad that she didn't get her high school diploma. But for a colored person to achieve an 11th grade education was already an achievement.

Simon Estes: But my mother was the one who did the talking. My father-- I learned from him, from the power of example. He was a quiet man, kind of like Abraham Lincoln. But when he spoke, he spoke with authority and with love. He never ever yelled or raised his voice at my mother or my three older sisters or me. But he was a hard-working man. The little house we grew up in, we didn't have running water, we didn't have electricity, we didn't have indoor facilities. You know what I mean? And you know how cold it gets in Iowa. And it was even colder back then before the climate change.

Simon Estes: But we were a closely-knit family. When I was 11 years old, my mother said, "Son, how would you like to read the Bible through with me?" And I said, well, okay. She said, "All we have to do is read three chapters a day and five on Sunday and we will complete it in a year." So when I was 11 years of age, I was introduced to the greatest book ever written, thousands of years old. And it's a beautiful book because it gives us guidelines on how to live our lives. And the fundamental of this great book called the Bible is to love God and to love one another.

Simon Estes: My oldest daughter gave me a heart that was able to stand. A number of years ago, my oldest daughter, Jennifer, and it says love is the music of the soul. When I work with young people, I often tell them, I'm kind of skipping ahead

now, but to make sure that they not only sang with a technique that is cerebral and intellectual, but I tell them to sing from their hearts and their souls. So we'll go back now to Centerville. And from there I can ... I'll let you ask more questions.

Joan Kjaer: Oh sure. So just to move ahead, there's much more we can say about your young life and feel free to go back to that. But when you did come here to the University of Iowa, as I understand it, you didn't come with the intention to be in the School of Music. You were intending to study medicine.

Simon Estes: Yes. When I was in Centerville, I sang the first time in the Second Baptist Church the solo "Precious Lord Take My Hand". But when I was in elementary school, the principal was also the music teacher. Her name was Ellen Clark. And so the students who had, I guess, what she thought were the nicest voices could come sit in the front. And of course I didn't realize at that time that I had a talent to sing. I just didn't. So she said, you come sit in the front.

Simon Estes: When I was in junior high school, the high school choral director, Don Gunderson was his name, he invited me or asked the principal, first of all, if the junior high school consented, he asked us to come sing in the high school choir, and that had never been done before. So the principal allowed it, the junior high school, which is kind of across the street. So I went over and sang with the high school students and I sang first soprano with the girls. I really did. And, well, I enjoyed sitting with the girls too, but I sang soprano.

Simon Estes: I played football, basketball, track, all the sports, and Don Gunderson was always a little bit sad because they had competitions then. I don't know if they still do that. You would go with the quartet and soloists, et cetera, et cetera. And so I would enter ... he would enter me and it was in Cedar Falls, which used to be called Iowa Teacher's College. And I never won a prize. And he was always frustrated. And I asked Don Gunderson when we were driving one time up there from Centerville to Cedar Falls, do you think I could ever earn a living by being the singer? And he said yes, but, of course, I was thinking in terms of Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Perry Como, that type of music.

Simon Estes: In my senior year, during the summer time, I worked jobs, I did all kinds of jobs. I won't bore you with all of that, but I went to choir rehearsal and I hadn't done any singing during the summer. And I went to sing and [inaudible 00:20:16]. I didn't have my soprano voice and I was about 18 years of age. And so Don Gunderson sent me to the doctor. And we didn't have any throat specialists in Centerville, Iowa, in those days.

Simon Estes: And he put in his little wooden stick and pushed my tongue down. He never even saw my vocal cords as I know now, but he just looked in my throat. He said, I don't see anything wrong with your throat, and I didn't even know about vocal cords, honestly, I really didn't. He said I just have a feeling your voice is

changing and that's what happened. And so I thought, well there goes my singing career. No more Nat King Cole or Perry Como.

Simon Estes: So I thought I would ... I went to junior college one year in Centerville. I transferred to University of Iowa and I thought, well, I can't sing so I'll be a doctor. So I was in pre-med, so that brought me up to that part. But while I was there ... here, I said there but now I'm here...I wanted to sing. Now don't be upset. This a little bit, it sounds like a sad story, but it has a happy ending. I wanted to sing in the university choir and the choral director wouldn't let me sing in the choir.

Simon Estes: He said, your voice isn't good enough to sing in the choir, the big choir. I said, oh, well, you're the head of the voice department, can I take voice lessons with you? He said, no, no, no, no, you have no talent, I wouldn't waste my time with you. He said, however, there's a young teacher coming here this fall. And he said, maybe he will take you. I said, okay. I didn't care. I just wanted to sing. And that was Charles Kellis. I know there's one person here that does know who Charles Kellis was and still is because he'll be 93 years of age in April.

Simon Estes: And Mr. Kellis heard me singing. I had already been told I couldn't sing in the university choir. But he did say there's another group on campus called the Old Gold Singers. And so he said, maybe you can sing in that group because that's for non-music majors. I said, okay, I just wanted to sing. So Mr. Kellis heard me one time, he said he was walking down a corridor and he said, and I didn't know this, he just told me this really three years ago. He said, I heard your voice, and he used the word 'penetrating,' through the door. Didn't mean anything to me.

Simon Estes: And so he started giving me voice lessons and I didn't have money to pay him for private lessons, but he would give me voice lessons sometimes for two, three hours a day. He'd always want me to go in North Hall when it was empty and I wouldn't be sitting here today had it not been for Charles Kellis. He said you have a voice to sing opera. And I said, having come from Centerville, what's opera?

Simon Estes: He played some recordings for me of opera singers, Cesare Sieppe, who was a fantastic Italian bass baritone, the very famous Maria Callas, Leontyne Price, and Rimsky-Korsakov, that's a symphonic piece of music. So those Big 33 1/3s, he played those records for me. When I finished listening, I said to Mr. Kellis, and I was very serious, I said, "Mr. Kellis, I really liked that stuff." I really said stuff. I was in Centerville, remember. And he said you need to go to an all musical school.

Simon Estes: But I want to stick here with Iowa City for just a little bit. They were some of the happiest days of my life when I left Centerville and came to Iowa City. I loved the atmosphere of education and I always did like school when I was even in Centerville, I never even wanted to catch a cold or miss day of school, I just loved going to school. And so Mr. Kellis was the man who discovered me, but I

would also, I just saw a man here when I was coming in who was with the Methodist Church, is that right back there? Is that John Backus? He's a Greek, but that's okay.

Simon Estes: Mr Kellis is also Greek, but this man really was so wonderful to me and he said, Simon, you can have a career singing opera. So he got an audition for me at Juilliard School of Music. But still while I was here, before I got there, I needed to earn some money to fly out to New York. And presidents are very important Mr. President. And they have a lot of power. So Mr. Kellis went to President Hancher, because this had never been done before.

Simon Estes: He asked President Hancher, could Simon Estes sing a concert and raise money in order to make enough money to fly out to New York and audition for Juilliard School of Music? And the person who asked President Hancher-- his name was Fred Dohard--Fred Dohard was from Northwestern University, but he was originally from Orlando, Florida. He was a big, tall 6 foot 10 black kid from Florida. And he went to Northwestern.

Simon Estes: I tell you this because it's an interesting story. Fred had an impact on my life, too. He was the one that went to President Hancher and asked him, he said Simon Estes, Mr. President can really "chirp." That's what Fred said. And so the president said yes. So they made it possible that I could sing a concert in the Methodist Church and we raised \$287 to help get me to New York City. But I want to tell you a story about Fred Dohard. I told you it was this big, black-- we were colored in those days and later we became Negro with the little N and then a capital N and then I think black and then Afro American and then African American.

Simon Estes: I really don't know what I am but I do know that I am a child of God'and I'm a human being. So Fred Dohard got a scholarship to play basketball and football at Northwestern and during the game he got his neck broken, the third vertebrae, which is, unfortunately, the worst. I'm telling you this because Fred Dohard is the one that went to the president. And so the doctors told Fred he would never ever walk again. And Fred Dohard said to me, he always called me, we say Simon Estes, but he always called me Simon Esteeeee. He said Simon Esteeeee, he said, and his name was Fred Dohard. And he called himself the Do. He said, the Do looked up at those doctors and said, "The Do will walk again."

Simon Estes: Not only did Fred Dohard walk again, but he even played basketball and all the doctors said it was a miracle. Northwestern is a fine institution and Fred played basketball, but they say don't ever play football. So Fred graduated from Northwestern with a C average, grade point average, and he wanted to be a doctor. Can you imagine a big, tall, colored guy with a C average wanting to get into medical school? No school accepted him. They wouldn't even give him an interview. But the medical school at the University of Iowa gave him an interview.

Simon Estes: You know some of you here, remember a doctor named Paul, Shorty Paul, we called him. Some of you remember Shorty Paul? He discovered bufferin. He was the head of the, medical school. All of the doctors said, no, we just can't. I mean, the guy doesn't even have a B average. He's got a C average. So they all said no. They called him Shorty Paul because he's only about five feet tall. It's really true. And Shorty Paul said, I am going to overrule all of you. He said, I like the way this man presented himself.

Simon Estes: He said, what do we have to lose if we give him one semester? Well, Fred Dohard was accepted here at the University of Iowa and became a doctor and it was Fred Dohard who went to the president for me. We were roommates and President Hancher said, okay, Fred, he can do a concert. So that's something that is meaningful. When I came to Iowa City, I also worked a job with the Iowa City Press Citizen. I'd work from 12 midnight till 6:30 in the morning. Those are big plates with all of the letters, I worked in the dormitory washing pots and pans. There was a drug store here called Jack Lubins.

Simon Estes: John Packer you probably remember that, remember Lubins Drug Store? I worked there and Jack didn't pay any money, but he said, I'll let you have two meals a day. That was okay. And so I was always happy in spite of ... we had discrimination, let's just face it back in 50s and early 60s right here, all over Iowa. But I never did learn to hate. My mother always told me, don't ever hate, son. And I'll give you just two little examples that I was taught when I was a young boy.

Simon Estes: If I would come home and tell my mother that a white boy called me the N word or he hit me, my mother said, "son, you get down on your knees and you pray for that boy." Well, when you're seven, eight years of age, you think there's something wrong with your mother. You know what I'm saying? Mother, he hit me. He called ... get down on your knees and you pray. And my parents never did tell us anything negative about white people.

Simon Estes: The strongest statement or question, in whatever way you want to interpret it, is this, what my mother said. She said, "Son, I just don't know why those white people treat us colored people this way." That was the strongest she ever said about white people and she just always said pray for them. And that played an important part when I started singing opera. I know I'm skipping ahead again, but I was singing all over Europe, Paris, London, Rome, Vienna, its epicenter, but opera houses wouldn't let me sing here. And I was living in New York City visiting the early 70s, around 71, 72 and I said to my mother ... I called my mother, I was living in New York, and I'm not ashamed to admit it, but I was crying tears.

Simon Estes: I said, I've sung in all these places, but they won't let me sing in my own country. And you know what my mother said, don't you? She was sitting there saying, you can get down on your knees and you pray. So I've sung in all the major

opera houses in the United States. That's the power of prayer. And it's also the power of never hating anyone.

Simon Estes: We can hate what people do, but we must not hate another fellow human being. And my parents instilled that in me when I was a little boy and it paid off. I remember there was a bishop in Iowa City, Iowa State, I mean in Ames, rather, and had lunch with, and he was the bishop over all of the Methodist churches in the mid part of the United States. And he asked me once, he said, "Simon, why don't you have hate in your heart?" And I very quickly said to him, I don't have any room for hate, but I'm grateful that my parents gave me these values, parts of our character in life. So now I'll go back to you. You can ask another question because ...

Joan Kjaer: Well, we can kind of stick with this a part of your life when you have now graduated from Juilliard and you have, to your surprise, while still a student, received a contract. You might tell this story of how your work began in Europe, how you had such a strong career in Europe, partly because you were kept out of the opera world here. But as you told me on the phone, you had the experience of racism on both sides of the ocean.

Simon Estes: Yes. That's for sure. Is this still working? Okay. I started out in Berlin as a presence at the Deutsche Oper. I made my debut singing Ramfis in the opera Aida and then singing in all these major opera houses and I came back to the States, that situation. But when I wandered back up to if, when I flew out to Juilliard, because for those music students here, you might find it a little interesting.

Simon Estes: Number one, I was so naive about classical music, et cetera, et cetera. I ... and my parents never taught me fear, the only fear they said you have to have, son, is you fear the Lord. And that doesn't mean this type of nervousness, but reverence. And so when I went up to Juilliard to audition, I didn't have enough sense or fear even to be nervous. I thought singing for those people, that jury sitting out there, it's like a couple of, four or five, teachers from Centerville high school.

Simon Estes: So I sang my three songs and my three arias. And after I finished, the head of the jury at Juilliard told me just to wait outside the door. So I went out and they called me back in ... actually I forgot to tell you something. I was more excited about seeing the skyscrapers in New York than I was auditioning for Juilliard. So I went out and they called me back in. This would show you the naivete that I had. They said, well, we've decided we want to give you a full scholarship to come to Juilliard. I said, well, okay.

Simon Estes: They looked at me like I was some kind of a nut and then they had the niceness to say, and we'll get you a grant from the Rockefeller family. And I thought, family dealing in rocks? But it was the Rockefeller family, Martha Baird Rockefeller Foundation. So I feel that my whole destiny was already planned for

me by God before I was born because all of these, Ellen Clark in high school, Don Gunderson in high school, Charles Kellis at the University of Iowa, Juilliard School of Music, it was all prearranged, I think really.

Simon Estes: And so I have been very, very blessed. And as the president mentioned, I have sung all around the world, as you know. And in addition to the 84 opera houses, I've sung with 115 orchestras. I've sung 102 roles in opera. That's for the music students. So there's a lot of repertoire out there for you. But I have sung 102 roles in German, Italian, French, Russian, Spanish, Catalan. I didn't know that God had given me a talent for languages because I never studied any of those languages. And I've sung and then I recorded in all of them.

Simon Estes: And I didn't know I had a talent to memorize, either, because when I auditioned to get into the Deutsche Oper in West Berlin, is that the part of that story that you eventually wanted me to tell you about? And I went off on another trail? While I was at Juilliard, I met a girlfriend and she graduated in 1964 and I was still a student at Juilliard. So I wanted to see her at Christmas time and, of course, I didn't have any money.

Simon Estes: And I said to her, I said try to find somebody for me to sing for. I say, because I have to tell the truth, and I'll see if I can go someplace and raise enough money to go come over to Germany. She was in Dusseldorf and so she had an agent herself and she told this agent about me. I don't know what she said but I guess she said this guy must have a nice voice or something. So I went to the NAACP. Now advanced people, citizens, you know what the NAACP is.

Simon Estes: And young people, ask your neighbor if that person is a little advanced. And so I go into the NAACP again, this is good that you're not nervous. You know, not scared. Centerville was good to me because even though we had a lot of racial discrimination, I just never learned fear. So I go to the NAACP and Roy Wilkins was the president of the NAACP. So I went down there to New York in one of these big buildings, I walked in, this staff asked me may I help you. I said, well, yes I'd like to talk about somebody ... talk with someone ... well I need to get some money. I said go to Europe and sing in an audition. And, of course, she looked at me like I was a stray dog with the mange or something.

Simon Estes: And she said, well we don't really have funds for something like that. I said, well, but it's a really special opportunity because I just talked to someone. So she said, well, okay. So she let me go talk with someone. And I talked to this individual and they said, well, we just really don't have funds for that. I said, but I'm a student at Juilliard School of Music, Juilliard School of Music? I said, yes. So then I explained where I was going. And so they said, we don't have funds for this, but we liked the way you presented yourself. So we're going to take up a collection in the office. I thought I was in a colored church.

Simon Estes: They collected it and, back on those days, \$300 was a lot of money, a little over \$300, and then they said, go to the New York Community Trust Fund and tell

them that we sent you there and they'll give you some more money. So I went there and they gave me some more money. So I had enough to come over to Germany and audition. But the main reason is I wanted to see my girlfriend, but I didn't tell them that.

Joan Kjaer: No.

Simon Estes: And I got a contract and she didn't. So we broke up.

Joan Kjaer: Oh my gosh. So you're still a student at Juilliard at this time?

Simon Estes: I was still a student at Juilliard. I came back, they offered me ... I auditioned for this agent, Friedrich Parashan, in Dusseldorf. He sends me to Berlin, the Deutsche Oper. Still naïve, Simon Estes walks out on the stage and the Deutsche Oper is like the Metropolitan Opera in New York. I walked out there and sang my arias and they said, okay, come down, come down off the stage. They said, we'd like you to sing Ramfis and Aida on the 19th of April, 1965. And once again I said okay.

Simon Estes: And so ... and I was student at Juilliard. So I went back to New York. I went to Dean Waldrip, he was the dean and Peter Manan was the president of Juilliard at that time. So I went to the dean and I said, Dean Waldrip, I've got a chance to sing Ramfis, the high priest, in Aida at the Deutsche Oper. He said, well Simon, you'll have to tell them no. He said, because if you don't finish Juilliard School of Music, you'll never have a career.

Simon Estes: And my poor little heart just sank. So I thought, I'll overrule you, I'll go see Christopher West. He's the head of the opera theater at Juilliard. So I go to Christopher West and I tell him, because I knew he would understand. And Christopher West, he was British, but he was head of the opera theater. Well, Simon, he said, I'll tell you what. You'll have to tell them no because if you don't finish Juilliard School of Music, you shall never have a career. Sinking heart again. But something said, go east young man, go east.

Simon Estes: So I left Juilliard and I went to Berlin and sang. They told me at first when I auditioned, that I was just singing the King in Aida. The King is a nice bass role, but Ramfis is the high priest. That's the main bass role in the whole opera. And I arrived there about 12 days before I made my debut and the director said I had to sing Ramfis, and I had learned the King, and it was in German and not Italian.

Simon Estes: So I called Mr. Kellis in New York. He said, Simone he always called me Simone. He said, I don't understand this. I said, well I don't either, Mr. Kellis. I said ... because he said, you've learned the King. You said, "Work hard, Simon, you can do it." Although he did say Simone. I learned that role in 11 days. I had never sung on a stage before in my life or with an orchestra. And this is why I know there's a God because God gave me the talent to sing and he gave me a talent

to memorize and for languages. And I didn't know that because I didn't study any languages.

Simon Estes: So I learned it. I didn't meet the conductor, [foreign language 00:44:58] Italian conductor until after the opera. He came to my dressing room, he said Simon, nobody told me you'd never sung the role before. He said I would have worked with you, but he said you did all right. And I never met the lady named Gloria Davy who sang Aida until on the stage that night. What they did, they put you in a rehearsal room all alone with the pianist and assistant stage director and they said, well, during this scene you're here and when Aida comes in, you go over there.

Simon Estes: Like I didn't meet any of my colleagues until I saw them on the night of the performance. This is the honest truth. Knowing what I know now, I could never have done it, but I was naive. So all of those, Richard Castle, some of you probably know that name, he's a famous tenor. He sang [radamez 00:46:00], I sang the high priest and Ruth Heso, an Italian mezzo sang [ameris 00:46:06]. So after the performance, Mr. Kallis had asked me to be sure I called him, let him know how it went.

Simon Estes: You see Mr. Kallis told me ... he said, Simone, you can learn it. So I called him afterwards. He said, how did it go? I said, well it went okay. And they've asked me to stay here and sing some more roles and I didn't know really that God, that's why I give all the praise and glory to God. He's the one who gave me the talent to sing, to memorize, to learn languages and all of that, really, because today, knowing what I know now, I don't know how I did it. I really don't. So that's how I got to the Berlin Deutsche Oper.

Joan Kjaer: Now at this time, you've already explained that you weren't able to sing. A black man was not able to sing in major opera houses here in the United States. And that was true for some time during your career?

Simon Estes: Yes. I got with Columbia Artists Management in 1965, 66 because I went to Moscow and I got the bronze medal in Tchaikovsky Competition in 1966. President Johnson invited me to come sing at the White House, I went out to sing in the Hollywood Bowl, et cetera. But a lot of the opera houses and orchestras just wouldn't let me sing. And so I remember I told you I called my mother about this, but eventually I told Columbia, I said, I want to sing. They would never book me in the South.

Simon Estes: I said, but I feel that I have a right to sing all over the United States. They said, well, Simon, it may not be safe for you. I said, I'll take that chance. So they did get me some dates in the South, and I can still remember my accompanist's name, his name was Harold Brown. He was a big, tall, white guy, taller than I, and we were sitting in a restaurant and these three white guys come in and this was in South Carolina, and they said, look at that n..... sitting here eating in this

restaurant, and Harold was about as big as Mr. Bienemann right here, and Harold started to say something.

Simon Estes: I said, Harold don't say anything. Let's just keep eating and pretending that we're enjoying our food because we have to walk out of here, and they were three rednecks. I was staying in a hotel one night, in one of the Southern states, and I had my tails on and white tie and I got in the elevator and a white lady got in there in the elevator. She looked at me and she said, boy, what did you do with it?

Simon Estes: I said, what are you talking about? She said we know you stole the jewelry from the ladies room on the fourth floor. I was the only colored person, of course, in that whole hotel, except those who were cleaning rooms, et cetera. I said, do I look like a thief? She said, that don't make no difference. I said double negative. She's not very well educated.

Simon Estes: So anyhow, I said, I didn't take the lady's jewelry. She said, well, we're going to search your room. Another time I was in another city and the patrolman followed [inaudible] from the airport to the hotel while we checked in, came down to eat. He walked over at the restaurant and said, I just want to let you know I'm keeping my eyes on you boys.

Simon Estes: So I went through a lot of that, but still I didn't hate it. I didn't like the way that people treated me, but I still didn't hate them. And all of that is what started when I was a little boy that my parents taught me to be courageous, to be strong, and to be forgiving. Even if somebody does something wrong and they apologize or whatever, you have to forgive them. And I think a lot of this is because of music and education.

Simon Estes: And this is why I stress education so much because that gives us the capacity to learn, to reason, to try to think and to communicate. This International Impact Award. As I said before, I liked those two words, impact and the canvass, like covering the whole world. I only thought about that today, but we are only ... we all are human beings and, having traveled, I've sung on every continent on earth except the Antarctic. And I say the penguins haven't invited me there, but they're black and white and they get along. Isn't that nice?

Simon Estes: But what I have learned and, having sung in Australia and New Zealand, Africa, everywhere.... We are all God's children. And one of the professors, I took a course here at the University of Iowa in theology. I remember something that a professor said, I wish I could remember his name, but I don't. He said something very interesting and I've shared this with a number of people and my wife has heard it. My friend Harry Stine has heard about this. He said civilization began someplace in what we know as northeast Africa, going up from that part of the world.

Simon Estes: And he said, the people who remained in that area for thousands of years, their skin became dark, exposed to the sun. He said but their palms were light and the bottoms of their feet because they weren't to exposed to the sun. This was a professor right here at the University of Iowa and he said their nostrils became wider because heat, air, hot air rises, and he said the body made an adaptation to the climate.

Simon Estes: So the nostrils widened to get in more air. And then he said the people who had kept going farther North, he said their nostrils became more narrow to make an adaptation to the cold weather or perhaps their lungs would not be able to handle the cold temperature. And then he said, the people who went farther east, what we call Asia. He said, those people ... this was a professor here at the University of Iowa. He said a lot of those people lived in caves as they did in the mid East. And so he said what do you do when you go into a dark room? What? I heard a [sss 00:53:06]. Better diction, give me the whole word now. Squint, are you a student?

Simon Estes: Give him an A. You squint. And he said, so over thousands of years, people doing this all the time, he said, it's called levator palpebrae superioris, an extra layer of skin formed in the upper eyelid. And he said, and they can go to a plastic surgeon and have that removed and their eye will look like yours or mine. Now, I thought about that all these years and I still think it was a wonderful logical explanation.

Simon Estes: And we know that the native American Indians, they were in Asia, Russia, the Bering Strait, they went across over there. And that's how the original Native Americans, we call Indians. They came from Asia. But what I really believe is all of this was prearranged by God. And he made us different. The tests are characters. Can we love someone if they look different from the way we look?

Simon Estes: And that's a test that we are doing better on. But we're still not completely educated yet enough to realize that we are all ... there's only one race and that is the human race. And I say this because of having traveled all around the world. Africa, South America, China, Russia, Australia, New Zealand. We're all human beings. And so my philosophy, I do a lot of lectures all around the world, even at your old alma mater, Harvard University, Duke University and the conservatory in Moscow, Australia, New Zealand. I share with young people what I have learned from people who were wiser than I am. My mother always said, son, always put the Lord first. And she said always remember this:

Simon Estes: You can always be hurt by someone in life, but there's one person who will never hurt or betray you, and never hurt you, and that's God. For those of us who are Christians. And that has helped me in my whole life because I have been disappointed. I've been discriminated against. I learned to cope with it even as a little boy in Centerville when I was growing up. We couldn't swim in a swimming pool with white people. Then eventually they would let us swim on Saturdays from 9:00 until 11:00.

Simon Estes: And then we had to get out of the pool and they would put more disinfectant in the water. We were not allowed to sit with people, white people, downstairs in the movie theater. We had to sit up in a corner where the projector room was and the toilets were, and they call it the crow's nest. We had to sit up there. A lot of the restaurants we couldn't eat in in Centerville, Iowa. But through all of this, my wonderful Christian mother and father, she said, just pray for them.

Simon Estes: And this has been a quality that I learned at a young age and had it not been for music, this talent that God gave me to sing, and if I had perhaps had not been born this skin color, I don't know if I would be the same person that I am today. I'd like to think I would have been but I ... And I do still think that. But, nonetheless, the reality, that's what happened.

Simon Estes: But music has enabled me to learn in life, and music started thousands of years ago and if you read the Bible, when my wife and I, who's sitting right over there, got married, we decided to read the Bible through in our first year of marriage, three chapters a day and five on Sunday, and it was so good. We finished it in seven months and then another time we both read it through together that I was away singing someplace. My wife was here in Iowa. She went to church and said the minister said, "Why don't all you members out there read the Bible through?"

Simon Estes: You can do it chronologically or Genesis through Revelation. So my wife told me this. I came home being an obedient husband. My wife said we have to read the Bible through again. And so she did it chronologically, and I did it Genesis through Revelation. And this book, I promise all of you, if you haven't read it, is a best seller and what it does is basically very simple. Even in the Old Testament when God gave the 10 Commandments to Moses, he is the first one they said, love the Lord your God with all of your heart and soul and mind and strength.

Simon Estes: And the second one, and this is in the New Testament also: love your neighbor as yourself. And love is the presence of God inside of us. And God is good and good is God and God is love and love is God. So if you love someone, you're not going to hurt them. You're going to be kind, you're going to help them. And if they do do something not nice to you, you're going to forgive them. And my daddy didn't have the formal education, but he had a spiritual education. And my mother had an education, she had spiritual and academic.

Simon Estes: And so my parents taught my sister and me this at a very young age, and that's why actually I'm even sitting here today, is because education was stressed for me by my parents. And when I was in high school with EEW fan and was a superintendent of all the schools, called me over to his house one time and to have some lemonade and cake. And I thought: what have I done now that the superintendent is inviting me over to his house? And I went over and the teacher, even though it was a superintendent EEW fan, he said Simon, I want to tell you something.

Simon Estes: He said, if you continue to study hard and keep your nose to the grindstone, he said you're going to be somebody someday. I had no idea what he was talking about and I said, well, thank you Mr. Fannon. But I had positive input from my parents and my school teachers and this is why I tell people education is so important. It says in the book of Proverbs, right at the beginning. It says get knowledge. What is knowledge? Knowledge is education, is teachers.

Simon Estes: And it says get understanding, understanding is putting knowledge into practice, into action. And he said above all get wisdom. Wisdom comes from God. And so these three attributes, do you realize if we just followed those to love God and love each other, we'd have heaven on earth? Did you have another question? I'm sorry my wife-

Joan Kjaer: No, no, no. Well ...

Simon Estes: My wife has heard all of this, poor wives. But you know what? I was at Boston University for many years as a professor out there. And I also as I said, did lectures over at Harvard, at your old alma mater. My wife said, Simon, you need to slow down. This is about, I don't know, seven, eight, nine years ago. So we thought about it and she said, why don't you go to Iowa and just help children because we've been helping children really all around the world, et cetera, et cetera.

Simon Estes: So being an obedient husband, we came back to Iowa and that's when I started raising money. And I've always been a professor at Iowa State for many years, over 20 years. And I'm a professor now at DMAAC College in Des Moines, where they've got six campuses. But I love to work with students and I love to share what I have learned with younger people and hope to be a good citizen.

Simon Estes: You have your International Impact. Of course, international means all around the world as I said and I liked that, and I never thought of until you wrote a letter to me and asked me would I come and accept this award? And it was very touching to me. Then when I saw the pamphlet that you put in my hotel room and they have the word 'canvass' and I thought, I want you to realize canvass is something that covers, and so internationalism covers a whole world and that means there's education and there are people. So it's a good title and the impact means for us in a positive use of the word impact.

Joan Kjaer: Well, I can tell you that it was a great thrill for us when we learned that you were this year's awardee and, of course, a pleasure to have you here to hear the stories that you've told us tonight. But I'd also like to spend just a moment.... You've talked of course about how you want to help educate young people and how much of your work in these last years particularly has been dedicated to that, but you have also, around the world, made a real difference.

Joan Kjaer: President Harreld mentioned that you received an award from the United Nations regarding the work you've done to help provide nets for people in Africa

who suffer so badly from malaria and you worked on HIV AIDS. And I understand you had a very moving experience when you were in South Africa that opened your eyes to some of these needs at the time. I wonder if we could close out with you just talking about some of your most special memories of people you've met or moments where you felt that real change in your spirit.

Simon Estes: Yes. I've been very blessed in having met wonderful people all around the world. I sang many times for Nelson Mandela when he was still alive and my wife and I have been in the cell that he was staying in on Robben Island. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was a Nobel Prize winner. I've been very blessed. I've sung for seven Nobel Prize winners and I've sung for the Nobel Prize Committee and I think, as the president mentioned, I've actually sung for two popes at the Vatican. Even though I'm not Catholic, I've sung for them, I've sang for the Billy Graham Crusade.

Simon Estes: I've met some wonderful people who have, right here from Iowa, who are wonderful people. Norman Borlaug. We all know who Norman Borlaug was. I sang for him, knew him. He was a great scientist, another great scientist that I knew, but didn't know him until many years later when he retired, he came back to Iowa, Dr. James Van Allen.

Simon Estes: He heard me sing when I was a student here, I didn't know he was in the audience, but I just happened to be watching television one night many years ago and he had retired and he and two other ... I mentioned him because he's an Iowan. He was with two other scientists and they ... when they were younger, they didn't really believe in God and I just happened to catch that program. And these three scientists had changed. Once they got older and had a little more wisdom, they believed in God.

Simon Estes: And so I came back to Iowa City. I had to do a concert here and I called up the university and said, because I knew that Dr. James Van Allen had come back here, I said could you maybe give him my telephone number? I'd like to call him and talk with him. Well, to make a long story short. I met him in a restaurant here in Iowa City and we talked about religion and that is such an amazing story. And I said, what made you change from not believing in God to believing in God?

Simon Estes: And he explained it to me with his scientific knowledge and these other three men, they have this great gift in all that they did. He discovered the radiation belts out there in space and he was a great man and he did a lot, and Norman Borlaug did a lot. And I'm going to ask you people there, what was the first profession with mankind? What was the first professional? Want to pick some guesses?

Audience member: Prostitution?

Simon Estes: No, that wasn't the first one. The first profession was a farmer. God told Adam to take care of the garden. Is that true? Yeah. They said it's true. Their first profession was a farmer, and I often say, I think the two highest paid professions. Now I'm an opera singer and I'm a teacher, et cetera, et cetera. But the highest paid people should be teachers and farmers. What do teachers do? Exactly what the Bible told us, to get an education. What do farmers do? They feed us directly or indirectly.

Simon Estes: When you mentioned the situation about something that I did to help the children in Africa with malaria, when I sang for the grand finale concert in 1910 in Johannesburg, before I went up to sing, the moderator mentioned that every 30 seconds a child in Africa was dying from a mosquito bite--from malaria. And 90% of all of the malaria deaths in the world were in sub-Sahara Africa.

Simon Estes: And 1 million children are dying every year. This was 2010 and it was heavy on my heart. And finally in 2012- 2013 my wife and I flew out to Washington, D.C., to the United Nations Foundation to get some real factual information. They say it's true, well, it was true and they said 1 million children were dying every year. I said how many children have died in the last 20 years? 20 million little children died.

Simon Estes: So I decided I wanted to try to raise some money to help save these children's lives, and a very dear farmer friend of mine who is still alive and who is a great humanitarian--my wonderful friend, Harry Stine. I went to Harry and I said. "Harry I don't want you to give you any money. I'll work for it." And I talked to him and he and another man named [inaudible], some of you know who he is. They said, "Simon we'll recommend you go talk to some people."

Simon Estes: And because of this man ,who is a very dear friend of mine, he helped me to raise, but I worked for it and had students singing with me. We raised \$532,000 and we sent every penny to the United Nations Foundation and some people, anonymously, I don't know who to this day, read and heard what I had done here in Iowa and I did a big concert at the Hilton Coliseum and, in that one night's concert, we raised \$100,000. We had a thousand high school students who sang Christmas songs with us.

Simon Estes: We raised \$100,000 and then somebody else sent another \$100,000 and I don't know who. I have a letter from the United Nations. I think they wanted to remain anonymous, but I mentioned that because Iowa's had three very prominent people and both of them were farmers and one was a scientist and that's why I'm happy that my dear friend Harry Stine is here tonight. And I just say we are all put on this Earth to help one another and to love one another.

Simon Estes: And music, like my daughter's little statement said, love is the music of the soul. That's why I'm here today. And God is love and love is God. And so, yes, we help, my wife and I give lots of scholarships all around this country and in the state of Iowa. We are just put in this world, those of us who are blessed to help

one another. So now I want to thank you for your attention. I am scared to look at my wife because she comes to these things sometimes and she says Simon you talked too long. So I'm going to look over at my wife and if she does like that, that means that it's time to wrap it up.

Downing Thomas: She did it to him.

Simon Estes: I want to thank all of you. Really. I want to thank the University of Iowa. I want to thank the president, and you, and everybody who made it possible for me to receive this wonderful award that I will dedicate it to my grand- slave parents and my parents. And I always thank God for all that I get and I want to thank the University of Iowa because, as I said earlier, they were some of the happiest days in my life when I came to the University of Iowa.

Simon Estes: Starting back in 1957 and in spite of the little, some bumps along the way, I still love the University of Iowa and I want to close it with, which will sound very strange, but not really sad, because it has a happy ending.

Simon Estes: Mr. Kellis--I didn't know this until I had already been singing for many years, but John Backus, his Greek friend right back there knew about it--he never told me. And Mr. Kellis just told me this a few years ago. Himie Voxman was from Centerville, Iowa, and my uncle, Carl Jeter, went to school with Himie Voxman. Himie played the clarinet and Carl Jeter played the violin.

Simon Estes: But when Himie was the head of the music department here, I didn't know this. Mr Kellis never told me until John Backus told me and I confronted Mr. Kellis a number of years ago. Himie liked Mr. Kellis. He hired him, but he said to Mr. Kellis, "Why are you wasting your time with Estes? He said he doesn't really have much talent and will probably end up being a bartender." But you want to know something? When I came back to Iowa, I went to see Himie. I even saw him a few months before he passed away in a residence out west of town. He and I had the most beautiful conversation. He said, "Simon I'm so proud of you."

Simon Estes: I said, well, Mr. Voxman, I'm proud of you and I'm glad you were the head of the school of music or whatever our conversation was. I said I see you still have your clarinet there, do you still play it? He said, yes I still play it sometimes--but he was a wonderful man. And even though he didn't see something along the way, he didn't have to ever say, I'm sorry. Because when we met, when I was older and a professional singer, my heart met Himie's heart, and we talked about music. And Mr. Stark, some of you all know the name, Harold Stark. He was the head of the music department.

Simon Estes: He was the man that said I couldn't sing in the choir and I didn't have any talent. But in the mid-70s, I went to San Antonio to sing with the symphony orchestra and I did all these Wagnerian and Verdi arias, et cetera, et cetera. I didn't know that Harold Stark had retired and had gone to San Antonio, Texas. After the performance--and I hadn't seen Harold Stark for many years--he came back

after the performance and there was Mr. Stark and he did this (give me the other hand). I'm going to shake your hand. He said, "Well, Simon, I see you've done quite well for yourself."

Simon Estes: And that was so touching ... I really could see it. And I told this story to a few people. They said why didn't you wipe him out? He said ... I said, no, no, no. That's not the loving way to be. He didn't have to come back. I didn't even know he was in the audience. And he shook my hand and he said, "Well, Simon, you've done quite well for yourself." So I'm going to keep trying to do well, for Mr. Himie Voxman from Centerville, Iowa, and for Harold Stark, the University of Iowa, and for music. And, remember, the last thing I'm going to tell you, my daughter's little plaque she gave me --love is the music of the soul.

Simon Estes: So Himie's soul and my soul and Harold Stark's soul and Charles Kellis's soul, they've all come together because of music and education. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you, University of Iowa. Thank you, Joan, and all of you. God bless all of you. I love you. And let's keep music and education going. Okay?

Joan Kjaer: Thank you so much.